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Jeffrey Fagan

Columbia Law School, jfagan@law.columbia.edu

Tom Tyler

tom.tyler@nyu.edu

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LEGAL SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN
AND ADOLESCENTS
(*version of Sept. 2005*)

BY:

PROFESSOR JEFFREY FAGAN
COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

- AND -

PROFESSOR TOM R. TYLER
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
DEPT. OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Legal Socialization of Children and Adolescents

Jeffrey Fagan^{1,2,5} and Tom R. Tyler^{3,4}

Research on children and the law has recently renewed its focus on the development of children's ties to law and legal actors. We identify the developmental process through which these relations develop as legal socialization, a process that unfolds during childhood and adolescence as part of a vector of developmental capital that promotes compliance with the law and cooperation with legal actors. In this paper, we show that ties to the law and perceptions of law and legal actors among children and adolescents change over time and age. We show that neighborhood contexts and experiences with legal actors shape the outcomes of legal socialization. Children report lower ratings of legitimacy of the law and greater legal cynicism when they view interactions with legal actors as unfair and harsh. We show that perceived legitimacy of law and legal authorities shapes compliance with the law, and that these effects covary with social contexts including neighborhood. We identify neighborhood differences in this relationship that reflect differential experiences of children with criminal justice authorities and other social control agents. The results suggest that legal actors may play a role in socialization processes that lead to compliance with or rejection of legal and social norms.

KEY WORDS:

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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on child and adolescent development has focused new interest on children's behavior toward law. Research on psychosocial maturity, temperament, and cognition has shown that differences in developmental

¹Columbia University, New York, New York.

²MacArthur Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice.

³New York University, New York, New York.

⁴Law and Public Administration Program, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

⁵All correspondence should be addressed to Jeffrey Fagan, School of Law, Columbia University, 435 West 116th Street, New York, New York 10027; e-mail: jfagan@law.columbia.edu.

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trajectories and pathways are precursors of antisocial behavior, delinquency, and other problem behaviors (Lahey *et al.*, 2003; Rutter *et al.*, 1998; Steinberg and Cauffman, 1996). Development is not only important in explaining how often and perhaps why children will break the law, but also their behavior in interactions with legal actors (Burnett *et al.*, 2004; Grisso *et al.*, 2004).

Most attention has focused on psychosocial development and maturation as processes that promote compliance with the law and cooperation with legal actors. Deficits in psychosocial maturity often are cited as indicia of reduced culpability when young people run afoul of the law (Scott and Steinberg, 2003). In this framework, law and social rules are externalities to adolescent development. Compliance with the law is characterized as the outcome of a developmental process involving intra-individual characteristics. Law seems to have very little to do with it.

These contemporary developmental theories segregate legal socialization from other dimensions of development, and seek explanations for delinquent behavior that leave out experiences with the law. This separation of law from other domains of development is orthogonal to the notion of socialization toward the law itself, or at least socialization toward law's underlying moral bases and social rules. In this paper, we propose that there is a developmental process of *legal* socialization, and that this process unfolds during childhood and adolescence as part of a vector of developmental capital that promotes compliance with the law and cooperation with legal actors.

In an earlier era, there was extensive research on childhood legal socialization (see Tapp and Levine, 1977). Psychologists studying the development of moral values and orientations toward the legal system emphasized the crucial role of this childhood socialization process on subsequent adolescent and adult behavior. For this reason, a great deal of attention has been focused by psychologists and other social scientists on the importance of developing and maintaining moral values in children (Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg, 1977), as well as on the childhood antecedents of a positive orientation toward political, legal, and social authorities (Easton, 1965; Hyman, 1959; Krislov *et al.*, 1966; Melton, 1985; Parsons, 1967; Tapp and Levine, 1977). This earlier focus on developing a positive social and moral orientation has led to a new set of studies of childhood socialization (Hoffman, 1977, 2000).

These earlier studies provided evidence suggesting that the roots of social values lie in childhood experiences (Cohn and White, 1990; Easton and Dennis, 1969; Greenstein, 1965; Hyman, 1959; Merelman, 1986; Niemi, 1973; Torney, 1967). In particular, early orientations toward law and government were found to be affective in nature, and characterized by idealization and overly benevolent views about authority. These early views shaped the later views of adolescents, views that were both more cognitive and less idealized in form (Easton and Dennis, 1969). As a consequence, each stage of the socialization process focus to influence later, more complex, views.

The core argument underlying the legal socialization literature is that children develop an orientation toward law and legal authorities early in life, and that this early orientation shapes both adolescent- and adult-law-related behavior. Similarly, the psychological literature on the development of moral values suggests that values develop early in life, and similarly shape adolescent and adult behavior (Blasi, 1980). The studies within this literature support this argument by showing that both social orientations toward authority and moral values play a role in shaping the law-related behavior of adolescents and of adults (Tyler, 1990).

This Paper

In this paper, we examine evidence of developmental transitions in legal socialization among children and adolescents. We identify a developmental process of *legal* socialization, and suggest that this process unfolds during childhood and adolescence as part of a vector of developmental capital that promotes compliance with the law and cooperation with legal authorities. We translate these adolescent evaluations of law and legal authorities into specific measures of legitimacy of the law, and trace their development through early and middle adolescence. We consider how those evaluations change over time concurrent with important stages of cognitive and moral development. We explore the influence of adolescent experiences with legal authorities on views about their legitimacy.

Similar to other developmental processes, legal socialization is likely to be moderated by its social contexts, including peers, families, and especially neighborhoods. Given differential patterns of law enforcement and crime across neighborhoods, we assume that there are differences in patterns of legal socialization by race and neighborhood. Accordingly, we examine whether children's exposure to the law through personal experiences and the experiences of others will vary by neighborhood. We then analyze the concurrent influence of neighborhood and other social contexts on adolescents' compliance with the law. Finally, we test whether adolescent social experiences, in particular their interactions and experiences with the police, influence the trajectory of legitimacy by enhancing or undermining adolescent views that the law is fair and morally authoritative. We explore these questions by comparing samples of adolescents from two neighborhoods that differ in their racial composition, social structure, and patterns of crime and law enforcement.

LEGAL SOCIALIZATION

Because socialization processes in childhood bear on subsequent adolescent behavior, researchers have devoted considerable attention to the importance of developing and maintaining moral values in children (Hoffman, 2000; Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg, 1977). This developmental dimension includes the antecedents

of a positive orientation toward political, legal, and social authorities (Easton, 1965; Krislov *et al.*, 1966; Melton, 1985; Parsons, 1967; Tapp and Levine, 1977). Thus, childhood orientations toward law and morality are part of the more general argument that early childhood predispositions toward the law and their normative underpinnings play an important role in shaping adolescent and adult antisocial behavior (Niemi, 1973; Caspi and Moffitt, 1993).

Drawing from recent studies on children's behavior toward the law and legal actors, we assume that legal socialization is a critical part of adolescent development that shapes adolescents' attitudes and behaviors in a variety of legal tasks (Flanagan and Sherrod, 1998; Grisso, 2000; Grisso *et al.*, 2003; Steinberg and Cauffman, 1996). This certainly is true among adults, where there is consistent evidence across in studies with diverse populations in a wide range of tasks and settings showing that both moral values and orientations toward legal authority—such as perceived legitimacy—shape two dimensions of adult behavior with respect to the law: compliance and cooperation (Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Recent research has not, however, explored this relationship among adolescents.

The legitimation of the law is the central dynamic in this socialization process. Research on legitimacy and the law is premised upon three assumptions: (1) that people have views about the legitimacy of authorities; (2) that those views shape their behavior; and (3) that those views arise out of social interactions and experiences. These assumptions have been tested under a variety of sampling and measurement conditions, with consistent evidence supporting the basic claims that link legitimacy and legal behaviors (Tyler and Huo, 2002). Less well understood are the origins of legitimacy and its elasticity over time and across stages of the life course.

We identify this legitimation process as part of adolescent development, a process of legal socialization. Legal socialization is a developmental capacity that is the product of accumulated social experiences in several contexts where children interact with legal and other social control authorities. In this framework, what adolescents see and experience through interactions with police and other legal actors subtly shapes their perceptions of the relation between individuals and society. These experiences influence the development of their notions of law, rules, and agreements among members of society, and the legitimacy of authority to deal fairly with citizens who violate society's rules.

Accordingly, in this study, we focus on youth's understanding of and participation in legal processes that express societal norms, their assessments of the fairness of these processes, and their views of the legitimacy of the law and the institutions that enforce it. Individuals' notions of the fairness and morality of legal rules may influence their subsequent behavior in interactions with legal actors, in turn invoking mutual responses in a recurring pattern over time. Through these reciprocal interactions, adolescents can learn both from their experience as participants and observers in the law-in-action the importance and value of those behaviors that most people prize and expect.

Dimensions of Legal Socialization

Research on legal socialization among children and adults has identified three dimensions that may shape or sustain adolescent criminal behavior: institutional legitimacy; cynicism about the legal system; and moral ambiguity. Institutional legitimacy refers to feelings of obligation to defer to the rules and decisions associated with legal institutions and actors. It is assessed by measuring the degree to which people feel that they “ought to” obey decisions made by legal authorities, even when those decisions are viewed as wrong or not in their interests. Studies typically find that adults express strong feelings of obligation to obey the law, the police, and the courts (Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002).

Legal cynicism reflects general values about the legitimacy of law and social norms. It is based upon work on anomie (Srole, 1956), but is modified to reflect subgroup norms concerning minority urban communities (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998). “The common idea is the sense in which laws or rules are not considered binding in the existential, present lives of respondents . . . [legal cynicism] taps variation in respondents’ ratification of acting in ways that are ‘outside’ of law and social norms” (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998, p. 786). Instead, respondents feel that acting in ways that are outside the law and community norms of appropriate conduct is reasonable.

Moral disengagement involves the separation of conduct from moral standards relevant to that conduct (Bandura *et al.*, 1996). Adolescent behavior typically is shaped by moral values, which typically define illegal conduct as inconsistent with moral values. These values act as an internal control system, which inhibits immoral behavior. To the degree that people disengage from that system of internal controls, their behavior becomes more open to engaging in illegal conduct. The measurement of moral disengagement involves assessing eight distinct aspects of disengagement, each reflecting the tendency to justify engaging in conduct inconsistent with moral standards (Bandura *et al.*, 1996).

The Production of Legal Socialization Through Procedural Justice

Research with adults suggests that experiences with the law contribute to evaluations of its legitimacy. Although we know less about children’s evaluation of the law, an important factor influencing the development of adults’ views about legitimacy are their judgments about the fairness of the manner in which the police and the courts exercise their authority. Fair treatment allows people to attribute legitimacy to authorities and creates a set of obligations to conform to their norms. It communicates to participants directly and vicariously to people in contact with other participants in legal interactions that laws are both legitimate and moral. Fair treatment also may reduce feelings of anger that lead to rule breaking (Agnew, 1992, 1994; Sherman, 1993). It strengthens

ties to the law, a pivotal antecedent of delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). It counteracts labeling processes that are marginalizing and stigmatizing (Braithwaite, 1989). Tyler (1990) and several other studies report that fair treatment was positively related to law abiding behavior among both younger and older adults (see Paternoster *et al.*, 1997, for a review). In developmental terms, fair treatment strengthens ties and attachments to the laws and social norms, as well as group membership.

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Such procedural justice judgments are found to both shape reactions to personal experiences with legal authorities (Paternoster *et al.*, 1997; Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002) and to be important in assessments based upon the general activities of the police (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990). In both cases, adults view the police and courts as less legitimate when they personally experience or vicariously become aware of instances of procedural injustice. These same studies further indicate that adults usually define the fairness of procedures by considering four factors: the degree to which they have voice and can express their opinions and concerns; the neutrality and factuality of the decision-making procedures used; the politeness and respectfulness of their interpersonal treatment; and the degree to which they believe that the authorities are acting with benevolent and caring motives (Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002).

Hypotheses

As a developmental process, legal socialization should manifest differences by age in how children and adolescents experience and internalize their “legal” worlds. With age comes increasing exposure to rules, norms, and legal controls across multiple contexts of social control, and the accumulation of these experiences can influence the development of children’s notions about law and legal actors. Several studies show that children understand the law and its moral norms relatively early in adolescence (Tapp and Levine, 1977), but there have been no studies examining how their evaluations of the law and its legal actors change over time as experiences accumulate.

Direct experiences with social control are unlikely to be the sole mediators of legal socialization: children are exposed vicariously to evaluations of law through the attitudes and “factual” claims of their friends, neighbors, and family members about the law and legal institutions. Accordingly, legal socialization is likely to be an integrative process that internalizes information derived from children’s own experiences, their exposure to affective messages from others in response to their own experiences, and the cognitive frames that are prevalent within their neighborhood and peer group. That is, legal socialization is a process that is embedded in a set of interlocking social contexts and repeated social interactions over time in each of those settings.

Whether these recurring interactions influence children over time to either embrace or reject the law and its norms is uncertain. For example, recurring exposure to fair and respectful exercises of legal authority or social control should bring about positive views of the law and other social control agents, while unfair treatment should obviously erode trust in the law and rejection of its moral foundations and everyday expressions. At the same time, immersion in a social network of delinquent peers might color adolescents' evaluations of law. Adolescent development also may frame both how these interactions unfold and how they are interpreted. During early adolescence, the dynamics of identity formation and the pursuit of autonomy may lead children to reject the normative orientation that animates the social control efforts of authority figures in their lives. With typically low stakes in conformity and a narrow social world, there is no easy offset for adolescents' predictable tendency to view social control as an infringement on their autonomy and therefore "illegitimate."

Accordingly, we hypothesize that experiences with the law and legal actors will shape and modify trajectories of legal socialization. These subjective evaluations of fair and respectful treatment are not simply cold cognitions or judgments. Rather, we assume that these experiences carry with them an affective or emotional component that animates views about the legitimacy of the law, cynicism toward it, or a disengagement from the law's moral underpinnings. While fair treatment may enhance evaluations of the law, poor treatment may arouse negative reactions or even anger leading to defiance of the law's norms (Paternoster *et al.*, 1997; Sherman, 1993). This would suggest that procedural justice exerts both direct effects on compliance with the law as well as indirect effects by shaping evaluations of the law's legitimacy.

METHODS

The study was a cross-sectional analysis of data obtained from a community sample of $n = 215$ children and adolescents ages 10–16, drawn from two racially and socio-economically contrasting neighborhoods in one of the five boroughs of New York City. The age cohorts provided an opportunity to examine developmental progressions of legal socialization from early to middle adolescence, and to identify and control for moderating effects of both individual and social contextual factors. Sampling neighborhoods that differ in their rates of crime and legal interventions provides a further test of the effects of exposure to law and legal actors on legal socialization.

Research Sites

Study sites were the Red Hook and Bensonhurst neighborhoods in Brooklyn. These neighborhoods varied both in their socio-economic and racial composition.

In the year before the study, African Americans and Latinos comprised nearly 90% of the Red Hook population, but less than 10% of the Bensonhurst population. Red Hook had higher rates of several indicia of social and economic disadvantage: female headed households with minors, youth population, persons below poverty, children (0–16 years) living below poverty, and adults completing their high school degree. Bensonhurst included a higher percentage of White working class populations and immigrants: more than half the residents were foreign born, and nearly 60% reported at least one form of linguistic isolation. While median income in both neighborhoods was below the median for the city, the median income in Red Hook was more than one standard deviation below the city mean, and more than 10% lower than household incomes in Bensonhurst.

Table I shows important differences between the neighborhoods in their rates of crime and criminal justice involvement of their residents. Since both neighborhoods are patrolled by multiple police precincts, we included data from each of the precincts that were active in each neighborhood. We examined four indicia of crime and justice to characterize the exposure of children and adolescents to crime, law, and legal actors: reported crimes, stops by police, arrests, and incarcerations in either jail or prison. Crime rates in Bensonhurst were far lower, there were fewer visible interactions with police, and fewer citizens were involved with the legal system via arrest or incarceration.

We used felony crime complaints to the police as the measure of crime. Crime rates were lower in Bensonhurst, nearly 50% lower than the city average for the 3 years preceding sample recruitment (1998–2000). Citizen stops by police also were lower in the period immediately preceding the study. A study of police stops

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Table I. Crime, Arrests, and Incarceration by Neighborhood

Neighborhood	Felony crime complaints per 1000 persons, 1998–2000 ^a	Stops per 1000 persons per year, 1998–2000 ^b	Felony arrests per 1000 persons per year, 1998–2000 ^a	Jail and prison incarcerations per 1000 persons, 1990–96 ^c
Red Hook				
72nd precinct	23.0	15.5	11.5	2.3
76th precinct	30.1	28.9	17.8	2.4
78th precinct	35.6	23.3	10.6	2.1
Bensonhurst				
62nd precinct	18.8	11.3	4.2	0.4
66th precinct	15.2	14.6	4.2	0.6
City	30.9	23.9	14.9	2.3

^aSource: New York City Police Department, Crime and Arrests (various years). Rates based on 2000 population data.

^bSource: Office of the Attorney General, New York State, “Report on NYPD Stop and Frisk Practices” (1999).

^c25% sample of all prison and jail incarcerations for 1990, 1993, and 1996. Rate computed on the basis of 1990 population data. Source: New York State, Division of Criminal Justice Services, 20% sample of prison admissions and 5% sample of jail admissions. See Fagan *et al.* (2003)

and frisks of suspects by the Office of the Attorney General of New York State (1999) showed the police were far less aggressive in their street stops of citizens in the two police precincts in Bensonhurst: stop rates averaged about 13 stops per 1000 persons in Bensonhurst, compared to 22.6 in Red Hook. The highest precinct stop rate in Red Hook was nearly twice the rate of the higher of the two precincts in Bensonhurst. Arrest and incarceration rates were correspondingly higher in Red Hook, not surprising given the increased supply of persons available for arrest and punishment as a result of greater police aggressiveness. Felony arrests and incarcerations also were substantially higher in the three Red Hook precincts: felony arrest rates per 1000 persons were more than twice as high, and incarceration rates more than three times higher.

Samples

A random sample of children and adolescents ages 10–16 were recruited from each neighborhood. Households were identified through an enumeration process of residences in a random sample of census block groups in each neighborhood. Prior to contacting families, neighborhood residents were notified about the study via public education announcements and informational meetings with local community groups (e.g., PTA, Tenant Associations in public housing, church organizations). Letters were sent to parents or heads of households to identify which families had children of eligible participants and to invite them to participate in the study. Responding families were then given a short screening questionnaire to validate their residence and the presence of children, and were scheduled for a full interview.

Recruitment was managed to ensure variation by age and gender. Both males and females were included, despite the greater likelihood that police contacts would be with males (Office of the Attorney General, 1999). Nevertheless, young girls are affected both directly and vicariously through their interactions with legal institutions. For example, young women often are reluctant to report dating violence or other physical abuse by males because of the potential reactions of police (Freudenberg, 1998).

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With few exceptions, sample profiles reflected the social and demographic makeup of each neighborhood in 2000. Red Hook is an inner-city neighborhood with few Whites and high concentrations of poverty. Nearly 80% of Red Hook residents live in public housing (Department of City Planning, New York City). In contrast, Bensonhurst is a racially heterogeneous neighborhood with very few African Americans but substantial populations of other non-White racial and ethnic groups. Nearly half the Bensonhurst sample was non-Hispanic White (49.2%), compared to less than 1% in Red Hook. Latinos comprised 20% of the Bensonhurst sample and 17% of the Red Hook sample. The high percentage of foreign born parents in Bensonhurst residents and native born subjects suggest that many of the

latter are second generation immigrants, including members of both Latino and other ethnic groups.

Procedures

Subjects participated following parental consent. Subjects were paid for interviews via gift certificates valued at \$10.00 to one of several popular retail stores. In addition, subway fares (fare cards) valued at \$3 (for one round trip) were added to the stipend to facilitate travel to the interview site. Interviews took place in secure neutral locations in the neighborhoods. Examples include offices of NGO's, churches, and local public libraries. During warmer weather, interviews also were conducted in secluded outdoor locations in parks and playgrounds.

Variables and Measures

In addition to demographic information, data collection included five domains: personality, social context, the development of values about legal authorities (legal socialization), interaction quality with legal authorities (procedural justice), and antisocial behavior. Means, standard deviations, and scale properties are shown in Appendix A, and correlations in Appendix B.

Personality and Temperment

We used four subscales from the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) (Tellegen, 1982, 1985; Tellegen and Walker, 1994) to measure dimensions of personality and temperament that are predictive of antisocial behavior. *Control* ("self-control") is high when subjects describe themselves as reflective, cautious, careful, rational, and planful (Caspi *et al.*, 1997; Church and Burke, 1994; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Loeber and Farrington, 1998). Self-control was further divided into *control* ($\alpha = 0.971$) and *impulsivity* ($\alpha = 0.961$) subscales. *Aggression*, or "negative emotionality," is a tendency to experience aversive affective states including anxiety, anger, and irritability ($\alpha = 0.980$). People high on negative emotionality tend to construe events in a biased way, perceiving threat in the acts of others and menace in everyday social interactions. (Tellegen, 1982, 1985; Watson and Clark, 1984; Watson *et al.*, 1994). The fourth dimension, *alienation*, reflects the tendency of respondents to describe themselves as feeling mistreated, victimized, suspicious, betrayed, and the target of false rumors; they see the world as being peopled with potential enemies and expect mistreatment (Caspi *et al.*, 1994, 1997; Moffitt *et al.*, 1996) ($\alpha = 0.891$).

Social Contexts

We include measures of four social contexts that are robust predictors of crime and other antisocial behavior across a range of sampling and measurement conditions: violence exposure, family supervision, networks of delinquent peers, and perceived risks and benefits of crime.

We use the “MY ETV” (exposure to violence) inventory (Selner *et al.*, 1998) to measure *violence exposure*. Both direct and vicarious experiences of physical and sexual assault victimization during childhood and early adolescence raise concomitant risks of aggressive and violent behavior in late adolescence and early adulthood (Cooley *et al.*, 1995; Garbarino *et al.*, 1992; Osofsky, 1995), and can lead to psychological, physical, and social disruptions during adolescence and beyond (Coie and Dodge, 1997). ETV was developed and normed in a population sample of urban children and adolescents in Chicago. Since subjects vary in age, we use the past year exposure scale that includes witnessing and exposure and computed an additive scale of the number of different types of exposure that occurred in the past year ($\alpha = 0.805$).

We include measures of both the social and legal costs and rewards of sanctions. These scales predict individual differences in criminality among adolescents and college students (Nagin and Paternoster, 1991, 1994). Personal capital includes items social costs (reputation costs and relationship costs) and legal costs (sanction risks). It also includes a measure of “thrills” or intrinsic rewards of offending. These measures were developed and normed with college student samples (Nagin and Paternoster, 1991). Since subjects in this study are younger, we limit the measures to perceived risk and social rewards of antisocial behavior. Measures include perceived risk of arrest and punishment ($\alpha = 0.810$), personal rewards of crime (“thrills”) ($\alpha = 0.727$), and social costs of arrest ($\alpha = 0.735$).

We use measures of deviant peer groups and prosocial peer networks. Fagan *et al.* (1990) developed items that ask about the extent of involvement of close peers in antisocial activities, forming a scale of *peer deviance*: gang involvement of peers, involvement of peers in violence and illegal income-generating activities, substance abuse among peers, and juvenile and criminal justice system involvement of close friends ($\alpha = 0.728$). *Peer Networks* includes the number of close friends, frequency of contact with close friends, a rating of involvement of friends in everyday life (e.g., “can borrow money from my friends in an emergency”), and a rating of intimacy with close friends (“I share my thoughts and feelings with my friends”) ($\alpha = 0.560$).

Measures of family context include *Parental Supervision* and *Presence of Caring Adults*. *Parental Supervision* is measured using items derived from Fagan *et al.* (1990) where respondents are asked to rate their agreement with statements about parental knowledge of their children’s whereabouts, activities, close friends, problems in school, problems with the law, and sources of income. The mean of the five items produced a scale with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.904$). *Presence*

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of *Caring Adults* (Nakkula *et al.*, 1990; Phillips and Springer, 1992). Nakkula *et al.* (1990) determines the presence of supportive adults present in the adolescent's life in eight domains that form a single factor, with items such as "there are adults I admire and want to be like," and "there are adults I can go to if I need information or advice." The mean of these items form a scale with good reliability ($\alpha = 0.871$).

Legal Socialization

We include three domains of legal socialization: Legal Cynicism, Legitimacy, and Moral Disengagement. Following Sampson and Bartusch (1998), we modified Srole's (1956) legal anomie scale to create a measure of *Legal Cynicism* that assesses general values about the normative basis of law and social norms. The items assess whether laws or rules are not considered binding in the existential, present lives of respondents (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998). Respondents are asked to report their level of agreement with five statements, such as "laws are made to be broken" and "there are no right or wrong ways to make money." The measure is computed as the mean of the five items ($\alpha = 0.735$).

Legitimacy measures the respondent's perception of fairness and equity of legal actors in their contacts with citizens, including both police contacts and court processing (Tyler, 1997). The scales measure the experiential basis for translating interactions with legal processes into perceptions and evaluations of the law and the legal actors that enforce it. This measure taps several dimensions of fair treatment: correctability, ethicality, representativeness, and consistency (Tyler, 1997; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler and Lind, 1992). Respondents indicate their agreement with 11 statements such as "overall, the police are honest," and "the basic rights of citizens are protected by the courts." The measure is computed as the mean for the 11 items ($\alpha = 0.746$).

Moral Disengagement (Bandura *et al.*, 1996) was modified for this study to measure the adolescent's attitudes concerning the treatment of others. Respondents use a three-point scale to indicate their agreement with 32 items that show moral detachment from everyday social and legal norms that regulate social interactions, such as "It is alright to beat someone who bad mouths your family," "Slapping and shoving someone is just a way of joking," "Kids cannot be blamed for using bad words when all their friends do it," and "A kid in a gang should not be blamed for the trouble the gang causes." Following Bandura's scoring recommendations, we computed an additive scale of the total number of items endorsed ($\alpha = 0.882$).

Procedural Justice

We also include a measure of procedural justice, to represent perceived quality of interactions with legal actors including police, school security officers, and store

security staff. We adopted measures used by Lind, MacCoun *et al.* (1989, cited in Tyler and Lind, 1992), and Paternoster *et al.* (1997) to assess procedural justice. The subscales are based on their recent encounters with legal actors (e.g., ethicality, fairness, representation, consistency, respect, and correctability). These measures have proven to be robust predictors of legal compliance under a wide range of sampling and measurement conditions including general population surveys, criminal justice defendants, mediation and arbitration participants, persons filing workplace grievances, and participants in tort litigation (Tyler and Lind, 1992: 124–37). These measures have only recently been extended to persons in the criminal justice system (Paternoster *et al.*, 1997) and to adolescents. For this sample of children and adolescents, we limited these interactions to three domains: interactions with police officers, school disciplinary personnel, and private security personnel. We computed a summary *Procedural Justice* scale ($\alpha = 0.597$).

Antisocial Behavior

We use a reduced version of the Self-Report Delinquency scales used in both general population samples (Elliott *et al.*, 1985, 1989) and samples of inner-city youths from high-risk neighborhoods (Fagan *et al.*, 1990; Huizinga *et al.*, 1991). These have been adopted by Brame *et al.* (2004) to estimate sanction effects with a court sample of serious juvenile offenders. The level of seriousness in these 30 items was set for a general population of junior and senior high school subjects. The reporting period is the past year. We computed offending variety scores to measure the number of different types of behaviors in the past year (see, Thornberry and Krohn, 2000) ($\alpha = 0.776$).

RESULTS

Developmental Trends

Evidence of change over time in three dimensions of legal socialization appears in Fig. 1(a)–(c). These figures show that rejection of the legal and social norms underlying law increases with age. Figure 1(a) shows that cynicism grows over time, beginning at age 12, and increasing nearly monotonically from age 14. Not surprisingly, perceptions of legitimacy decline with age. Figure 1(b) shows that legitimacy declines sharply and monotonically from age 10 through age 14 before stabilizing in middle adolescence. The correlation between growing cynicism and declining legitimacy is significant ($r = -0.274$, $p < 0.001$).

Moral disengagement is relatively stable from ages 10 to 16, with the exception of a spike for the respondents 14 years of age. Figure 1(c) shows that moral disengagement is highest at age 14 but then declines to its lowest point at age 15. The range in scale scores for this measure of legal socialization (3.7–7.4) is greater

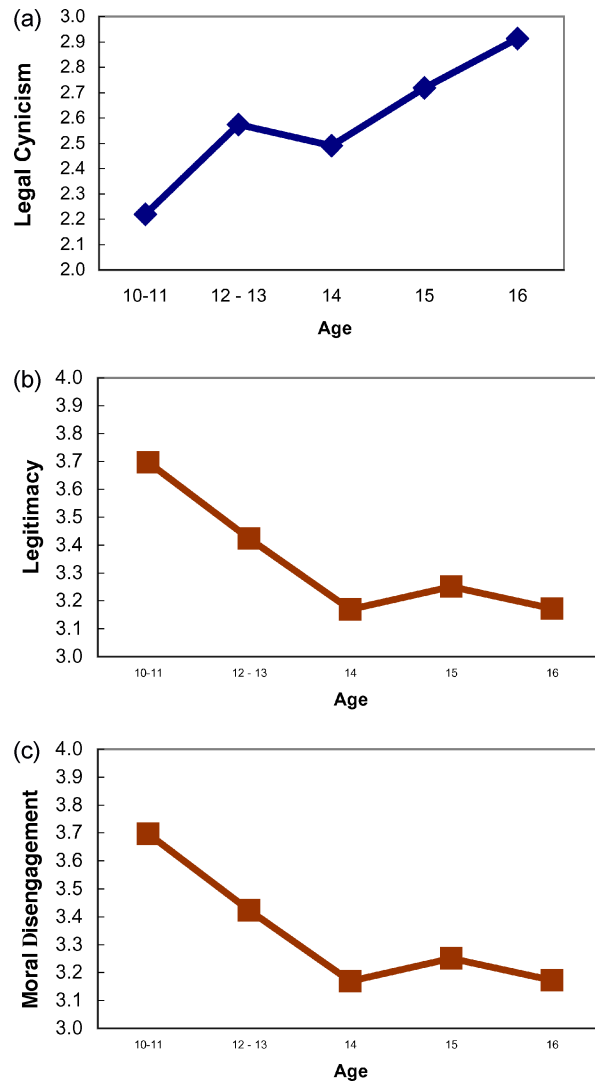


Fig. 1. (a) Legal cynicism by age. (b) Legitimacy by age. (c) Moral disengagement by age.

than the range for the other two measures of legal socialization. Using an alternate scaling technique suggested by Bandura *et al.* (1996), based on the mean of the item scores, this measure is stable across age groups, with scale scores at 1.4 for four of the five age points, and 1.6 for respondents age 14. These inconsistencies hint that there is little variation in this measure over time. The weak correlation of moral

disengagement with legal cynicism ($0.167, p < 0.05$) and the modest negative correlation with legitimacy is ($-0.307, p < 0.05$) both are theoretically consistent.

Contexts of Legal Socialization

We hypothesized that, similar to other developmental progressions, legal socialization develops over time through interactions in social contexts of families, peers, and neighborhood. We also hypothesized that the procedural justice of adolescents' direct or vicarious experiences with legal actors would influence the evaluation of the legal institutions those authorities represent. Measures of context included delinquent peers, parental supervision, violence exposure in the neighborhood, and perceived punishment risks. Neighborhood is a binary variable representing the differential exposure of children and adolescents to crime and law. We also hypothesized that legal socialization may be mediated by personality characteristics such as negative emotionality or aggressiveness, each of which might skew social interactions and bias evaluations of events and actors. Therefore, we included controls for four dimensions of personality: aggressiveness, alienation, control, and impulsivity.

We used Ordinary Least Squares regression models (Hanusheck and Jackson, 1977) to estimate the contributions of social contexts and personality plus procedural justice to each of three components of legal socialization: legitimacy, legal cynicism, and moral disengagement. Control variables included age, gender (female), and Latino ethnicity.⁶ We also estimated a latent construct of legal socialization using factor scores derived from a principal components factor analysis of the three separate legal socialization scales.⁷ The three scales loaded onto one factor (eigenvalue = 1.50) explaining 52.12% of the variance. Legitimacy loads negatively on the factor score, while the other two variables load positively. Thus, a higher factor score indicates poorer legal socialization. In Table II, we see unique patterns of predictors for each of these four indicia of legal socialization.

As predicted, procedural justice is a significant predictor of two of the three separate components of legitimacy, and of the composite measure of legal socialization. How children experience the law, or how they believe others experience the law, shapes their evaluations of legal actors and the underlying social norms that inform law. The first column in Table II shows that when perceived quality of interactions with legal actors is high, children give higher ratings to legitimacy, and embrace "the property that a rule or an authority has when others feel obligated to defer voluntarily" (Tyler, 2003, p. 307). The second column shows

⁶Neighborhood was heavily confounded with race: there were extremely few African Americans in the Bensonhurst sample and similarly few Whites in the Red Hook sample. For this reason, we used only the control for Latino population to avoid variance inflation in the regression estimates.

⁷Standardized scale scores were used for the principle components factor analysis, which was estimated using a varimax rotation.

Table II. OLS Regression of Social and Legal Contexts on Legal Socialization

	Legitimacy			Legal cynicism			Moral disengagement			Legal socialization		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Constant	2.039	0.519	3.928*	2.985	.529	5.639*	6.055	2.463	2.459***	1.094	0.587	1.865
Age	-0.044	0.037	-1.167	0.109	.038	2.855**	-.357	.177	-2.012***	0.057	0.042	1.343
Female	-0.021	0.111	-0.186	-0.172	.112	-1.530	-.333	.526	.633	-0.053	0.124	-.427
Latino	-0.177	0.127	-1.388	0.22	.128	1.717	2.692	.605	4.453*	0.507	0.142	3.564*
Deviant peers	-0.050	0.105	-0.471	-0.125	.107	-1.172	1.111	.500	2.224***	0.079	0.118	0.665
Parental supervision	0.295	0.091	3.244*	-0.082	.092	-.892	-.652	.432	-1.508	-0.309	0.102	-3.019**
Violence exposure	0.005	0.018	0.293	-0.002	.018	-.138	.190	.084	2.259***	0.015	0.020	.738
Punishment risk	0.058	0.015	3.618*	-0.012	.015	-.823	.105	.070	1.493	0.002	0.017	.098
Procedural justice	-0.006	0.016	-0.341	-0.041	.016	-2.490***	-.068	.076	-.900	-0.066	0.018	-3.664*
Aggression	-0.028	0.013	-2.18***	0.029	.016	1.752	0.418	0.077	5.445*	0.060	0.018	3.327*
Alienation	-0.006	0.018	-0.360	0.027	.013	2.040***	0.062	0.062	0.994	0.042	0.015	2.850*
Control	-0.001	0.023	-0.027	0.009	.018	0.515	0.103	0.085	1.208	0.020	0.020	0.969
Impulsivity	-0.001	0.023	-0.027	0.019	.024	0.797	0.019	0.111	0.171	0.012	0.026	0.468
Neighborhood	-0.125	0.123	-1.015	0.014	.124	0.109	-2.546	0.584	-4.363*	-0.170	0.138	-1.233
Model statistics												
Adjusted R ²		0.244			0.171			0.472				0.398
F		5.16			2.19			16.18				12.05
p(F)		0.000			0.000			0.000				0.000

p(t): *p < .001; **p < .01; ***p < .05.

that when adolescents perceived that interaction quality is poor, they may develop weak ties toward law that might justify either lack of cooperation with legal actors or antisocial behavior” (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998, p. 786). The positive and significant effect for age suggests that legal cynicism increases with age. In the fourth column, the results show that procedural justice also significantly predicts the composite legal socialization scale ($t = -2.02, p < 0.05$).⁸ The model R^2 is 0.398, suggestive of a modestly strong model.

The contributions of the four domains of social contexts vary for each of the components of legal socialization and for the construct. For legitimacy, parental supervision is the only significant predictor among the social context variables, and alienation is the only significant predictor among the personality variables. Procedural justice is a significant predictor of legitimacy, suggesting that fair and respectful treatment leads to more positive evaluations of the police and the courts. The overall model R^2 is 0.244, a modest result. For legal cynicism, none of the social context variables are significant, and alienation is a significant predictor. Procedural justice also predicts this component of legal socialization. The R^2 (0.171) is low, however, indicative of a relatively weak model.

The results of the model for moral disengagement show a different pattern of predictors. First, procedural justice was not significant in this model, in contrast to the other three models. Second, here, deviant peers, violence exposure, aggression, and neighborhood are significant predictors, a different set of context measures compared to the other three models. The pattern of predictors is similar to a pattern of what one might expect in a model of delinquent behavior, with significant contributions from peers and ecology of neighborhood violence (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994). The explained variance is high ($R^2 = 0.472$), indicative of a strong model, far stronger than the models for legitimacy or legal cynicism.

Thus, the factors that contribute to what Bandura *et al.* (1996) characterize as “[g]radual disengagement of moral self-sanction” are contextually embedded in peer networks and high crime neighborhoods. These are contexts where recurring acts of antisocial behavior allows for disengagement of moral self-regulation. As a consequence of disengagement behavior that is initially viewed as immoral becomes seen as more acceptable through cognitive restructuring (Bandura, 1990). A5 In other words, in these contexts, moral controls are attenuated, and justifications for antisocial behavior step to the cognitive forefront. The significant negative effect for age suggests that these processes are more likely among younger adolescents.

The personality measures make some contribution to legal socialization in the four models. Alienation and aggression are significant predictors separately in the first three models, and both are predictors of the composite measure

⁸Procedural justice is negatively associated with legal socialization. Since the scoring of the factor is inverse, with the highest contribution from a negative load for legitimacy, we predict an inverse relationship between the legal socialization construct and procedural justice.

of legal socialization in Table II. One might conclude that to a limited extent, legal socialization is a trait or propensity. But these personality variables also might be mediators, influencing interaction qualities and perhaps provoking both a negative reaction by legal authorities and a negative interpretation by the subject.

Finally, the strong coefficient for neighborhood suggests that moral disengagement is stronger in the Bensonhurst neighborhood than in Red Hook. At first glance, this seems unlikely, since crime higher and law enforcement more intensive in Red Hook. But violence exposure, a contextual effect that reflects the criminal ecology in a neighborhood, also contributes to moral disengagement. Thus, the neighborhood effect here may actually reflect the less intensive social control in Bensonhurst, fostering conditions where everyday violence can erode social and moral norms of the law. The ambiguity in the measure and meaning of neighborhood in this study suggests the need for more research on the contextual and ecological effects across a broader range of neighborhoods.

Legal Socialization and Compliance with the Law

To assess whether legal socialization was associated with self-reports of compliance with legal rules or laws, the legal socialization measures were entered into regression models together with the same set of contextual and personality predictors used in the models shown in Table II. Since both legal socialization and delinquency are predicted by the same set of contextual measures, we used the standardized residuals of the four legal socialization models estimated in Table III as predictors of self-reported delinquency. We estimated two models, one with the three separate components of legal socialization entered simultaneously, and one with the factor score representing a unified legal socialization measure. The measure of delinquency is a variety score of the number of different types of delinquent acts in which respondents said they were engaged during the past year (Thornberry and Krohn, 2001).

A5

In both models delinquency among children and adolescents is predicted by legal socialization processes through which adolescents develop positive values about the law. In Model 1 in Table II, legitimacy is a significant predictor of self-reported delinquency. Poorer evaluations of the legitimacy of the police and courts were associated with higher delinquency scores ($t = -2.42, p < 0.01$). The other two legal socialization measures were not significant predictors, suggesting the primacy of legitimacy among these three components of legal socialization. In Model 2, the composite legal socialization factor predicted delinquency ($t = -1.979, p < 0.05$). Again, since the factor structure is based on negative loads for legitimacy and positive loads for moral disengagement and legal cynicism, the positive parameter estimate for the composite legal socialization score indicates that poorer legal socialization is associated with higher rates of delinquency. Among control variables, delinquency rates were lower for females, consistent

Table III. OLS Regression of Legal Socialization, Social Contexts, and Personality on Past Year Self-Reported Crime

	Model 1: Components			Model 2: Construct		
	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>
Constant	2.346	1.497	1.567	0.980	1.019	0.962
Age	-0.009	0.090	-0.095	-0.028	0.088	-0.314
Female	-0.935	0.260	-3.590*	-0.880	0.259	-3.395***
Latino	0.608	0.309	1.966***	0.521	0.304	1.713
Legitimacy	-0.397	0.164	-2.419**	—	—	—
Legal cynicism	-0.184	0.160	-1.148	—	—	—
Moral disengagement	0.140	0.483	0.291	—	—	—
Legal socialization (composite)	—	—	—	0.280	0.141	1.979***
Deviant peers	1.271	0.240	5.292*	1.295	0.239	5.409*
Parental supervision	-0.329	0.218	-1.511	-0.349	0.217	-1.607
Violence exposure	0.285	0.040	7.097*	0.280	0.040	6.932*
Punishment risk	0.063	0.034	1.821	0.064	0.034	1.857
Aggression	0.072	0.040	1.812	0.056	0.038	1.488
Alienation	-0.037	0.031	-1.209	-0.042	0.031	-1.370
Control	-0.005	0.042	-0.123	-0.010	0.042	-0.235
Impulsivity	-0.095	0.054	-1.749	-0.102	0.054	-1.887
Neighborhood	-1.147	0.310	-3.698*	-1.095	0.286	-3.825*
Model statistics						
Adjusted R^2		0.568			0.565	
F		20.145			22.825	
$p(F)$		0.000			0.000	

Note. High scores on the composite legitimacy index indicate low legitimacy.

$p(t)$: * $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .05$.

with enduring trends in the criminological literature (cf., Moffitt *et al.*, 2001). There was no significant age effect, a departure from the robust age-crime relationships in much of the criminological literature (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993). Delinquency rates were higher for Latino youths, but only in Model 1 using the separate indicia of legal socialization.

Among the social context measures, deviant peers and violence exposure were social contexts that predicted delinquency, consistent with a large body of criminological research. None of the personality variables predicted delinquency. Neighborhood also predicted delinquency: rates were higher in the safer and less disadvantaged Bensonhurst neighborhood, contrary to predictions. Again, the binary measure of neighborhood makes it difficult to interpret the meaning of neighborhood in this model, and whether measurement error might account for this anomalous finding.⁹

⁹One explanation for the lower delinquency rates in Bensonhurst may be race differences in the veridicality of self-reports, with self-attenuation of delinquency scores in the Red Hook sample. The sample in Red Hook was about 45% African American, and prior studies suggest the possibility of lower self-reports by African American youths on a of problem behaviors (Hindelang *et al.*, 1981; Thornberry and Krohn, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

We identified process of legal socialization that unfolds over time and age, and produces changing values and perceptions of law and legal actors. Adolescents seem to initially believe that the law and legal authorities are legitimate, but that belief declines for some adolescents over time. Further, it seems that the legitimacy of law and legal authorities shapes compliance with the law, and that these effects covary with social contexts including neighborhood. This finding is consistent with that of studies of adults (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002), but it extends the range within which values shape behavior into the adolescent period. Since most crime is committed by adolescents, these findings suggest the importance of focusing on socialization to better understand when and how values are acquired. Finally, ratings of the procedural justice of the police shape legitimacy, suggesting that one source of adolescent values is social experience with legal actors across a range of contexts, including police, school security personnel, and security staff in businesses and private unregulated settings.

Theories of legitimacy and legitimation become important if the normative values which they focus play an important role in the legal system. This study suggests that these attributes of law shape norms and law-related behaviors among adolescents, not just the views of adults. This extension is important, since the vast majority of crimes are committed by adolescents. Accordingly, this study argues that beginning in adolescence legitimacy is an important force shaping law-related behavior.

This study also helps us to understand how legitimation occurs. Prior studies suggest that people's views about the legitimacy of authority are primarily linked to their evaluations of the procedures by which the police and courts operate. This study supports this procedural justice argument among adolescents. Like adults, adolescent views about the legitimacy of authority are influenced by procedural justice judgments about their own and others experiences with the police. The finding that procedural justice issues matter during adolescence is consistent with the results of several other recent studies. Fondacaro *et al.* (1998) found that the procedural justice by which parents resolve family disputes influences rule following in both family and community contexts. And, Otto and Dalbert (2005) found that whether incarcerated adolescents felt guilt over their crimes was shaped by whether they viewed their trial as fairly conducted.

Of course, we recognize that the process of socialization involves the development of a broader range of values, including attitudes toward democracy, views about other social groups, and tolerance of diversity. Further, it leads to many forms of potentially important behavior. Engagement in communities and in the political process is important, and is linked to values learned in childhood

(Flanagan and Sherrod, 1998). Hence it is important to emphasize that this study concerns only one aspect of the general process of socialization, as well as only speaking to one form of socially relevant behavior.

Just how important these results are depends on testing that expands on this study in four ways. First, studies across a wider range of neighborhood conditions are needed. Patterns of racial residential segregation in cities often lead to clustering of persons of the same race in single areas, and police responses may be unique to those areas. Further research is needed with neighborhoods that vary in their demography, crime rates and exposure to law enforcement. Sampling racially integrated neighborhoods is important to avoid confounding of race and policing styles. Second, panel data with multiple time points are needed to identify developmental trajectories of legal socialization, and identify their sensitivity to neighborhood effects including crime, social contexts, and exposure to different forms and patterns of social control. Third, the differences in legal socialization of males and females in this sample indicates that over-samples of adolescent girls may be necessary to identify the effects of legal socialization on their already high rates of compliance. Finally, the low skew in self-reported crime of teenagers in high crime areas may be a sign of underreporting and suggest the need both for collateral reports and alternate measures of compliance and cooperation with legal authorities.

APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON SCALES AND PREDICTORS

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	α
Aggression	0	16	5.83	3.79	0.980
Alienation	0	16	6.62	4.27	0.891
Impulsive	0	8	3.70	2.38	0.961
Control	0	11	7.86	2.69	0.971
Deviant peers	1.00	3.57	1.64	0.58	0.728
Prosocial peers	1.5	4	2.93	0.58	0.560
Presence of caring adult	1	9	2.58	1.87	0.871
Parental supervision	1	4	3.40	0.61	0.904
Exposure to violence	0	19	5.63	3.55	0.805
Legitimacy	1.00	6.73	3.30	0.78	0.746
Legal cynicism	1	5	2.68	0.77	0.735
Moral disengagement	0	25	4.82	4.55	0.882
Crime thrills	0.00	6.29	0.27	0.77	0.727
Procedural justice	6.83	25.5	16.70	3.34	0.597
Punishment risk	0	10	2.09	3.45	0.810
Social costs of crime	1.00	6.67	3.61	0.78	0.735
SRO—variety	0	14	1.22	2.44	0.776

APPENDIX B: CORRELATION MATRIX

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Aggression	0.398																
2. Alienation	0.473	0.294															
3. Impulsivity	-0.172	-0.002	0.294														
4. Control	0.376	0.172	0.293	-0.117													
5. Deviant peers	-0.348	-0.252	-0.190	0.163	-0.441												
6. Prosocial peers	0.203	0.084	0.216	-0.156	0.370	-0.254											
7. Presence of caring adult	-0.242	-0.090	-0.152	0.087	-0.298	0.343	-0.378										
8. Parental supervision	0.418	0.378	0.253	-0.136	0.374	-0.404	0.269	-0.368									
9. Exposure to violence	-0.050	-0.028	-0.114	0.047	-0.094	0.105	-0.080	0.072	0.024								
10. Punishment risk	0.305	0.009	0.202	-0.048	0.283	-0.218	0.274	-0.369	0.331	0.040							
11. Personal rewards	-0.244	-0.017	-0.273	0.022	-0.266	0.176	-0.227	0.173	-0.246	-0.034							
12. Social costs of crime	-0.186	-0.255	-0.107	0.020	-0.179	0.205	-0.115	0.329	-0.283	0.031	-0.175						
13. Legitimacy	0.236	0.270	0.166	0.007	0.093	-0.182	-0.013	-0.191	0.240	-0.087	0.025	-0.132	-0.274				
14. Legal cynicism	0.496	0.213	0.303	-0.066	0.462	-0.308	0.350	-0.336	0.369	-0.048	0.375	-0.132	-0.302	0.167			
15. Moral disengagement	-0.112	-0.210	-0.080	0.066	-0.213	0.222	-0.116	0.273	-0.386	0.031	-0.228	0.159	0.366	-0.257	-0.182		
16. Procedural justice	0.365	0.136	0.167	-0.145	0.562	-0.410	0.397	-0.451	0.562	-0.014	0.467	-0.253	-0.313	0.126	0.504	-0.280	
17. Self-reported delinquency																	

Note. Significance: $p < 0.05$ in bold.

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